

ten years on the edge
VERTIGOX

issue **14** **AUG** 03

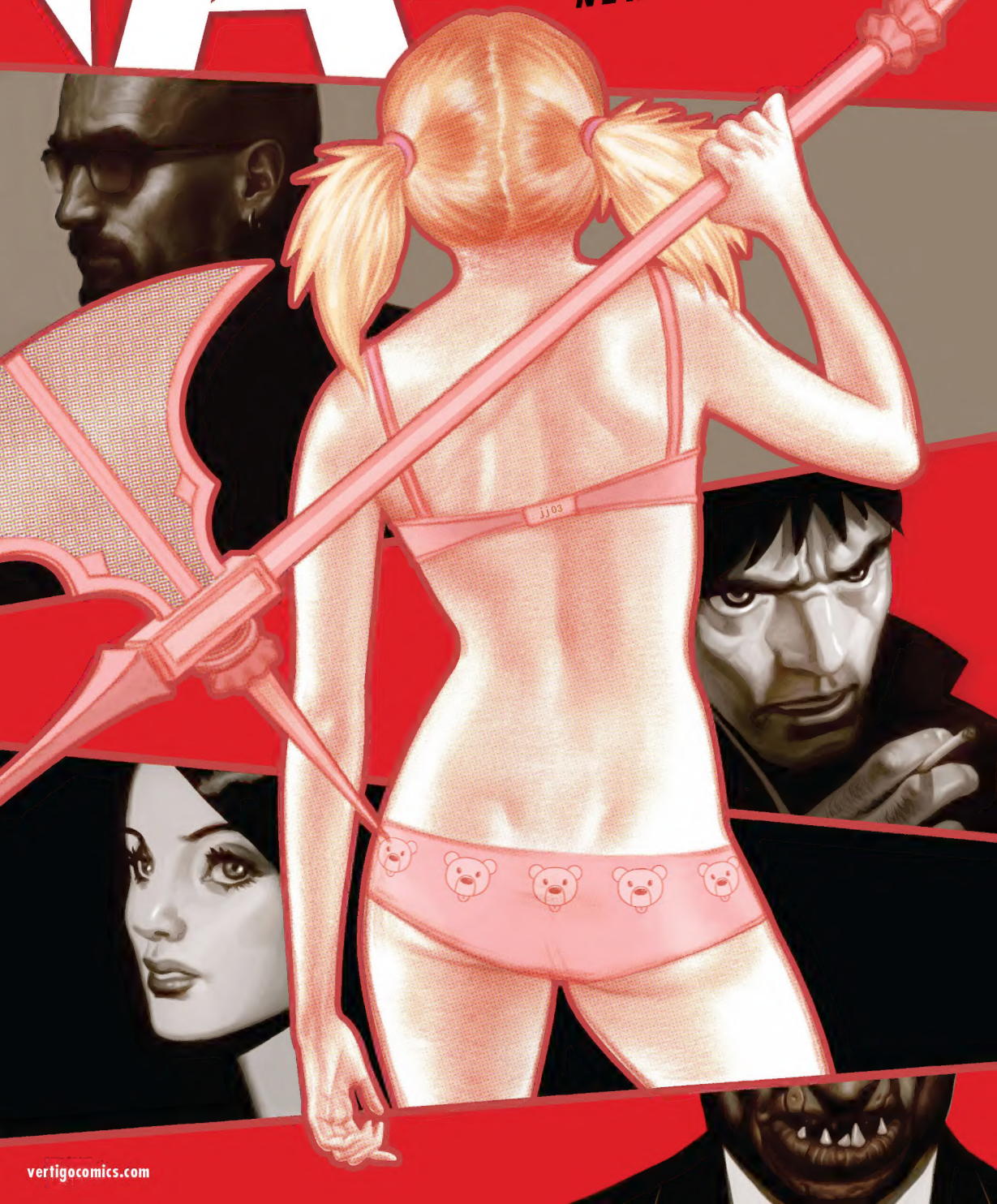
BILL WILLINGHAM MARK **BUCKINGHAM** STEVE **LEIALOHA**
SUGGESTED FOR MATURE READERS



FABLES

STORYBOOK
LOVE
1

NEW STORYLINE

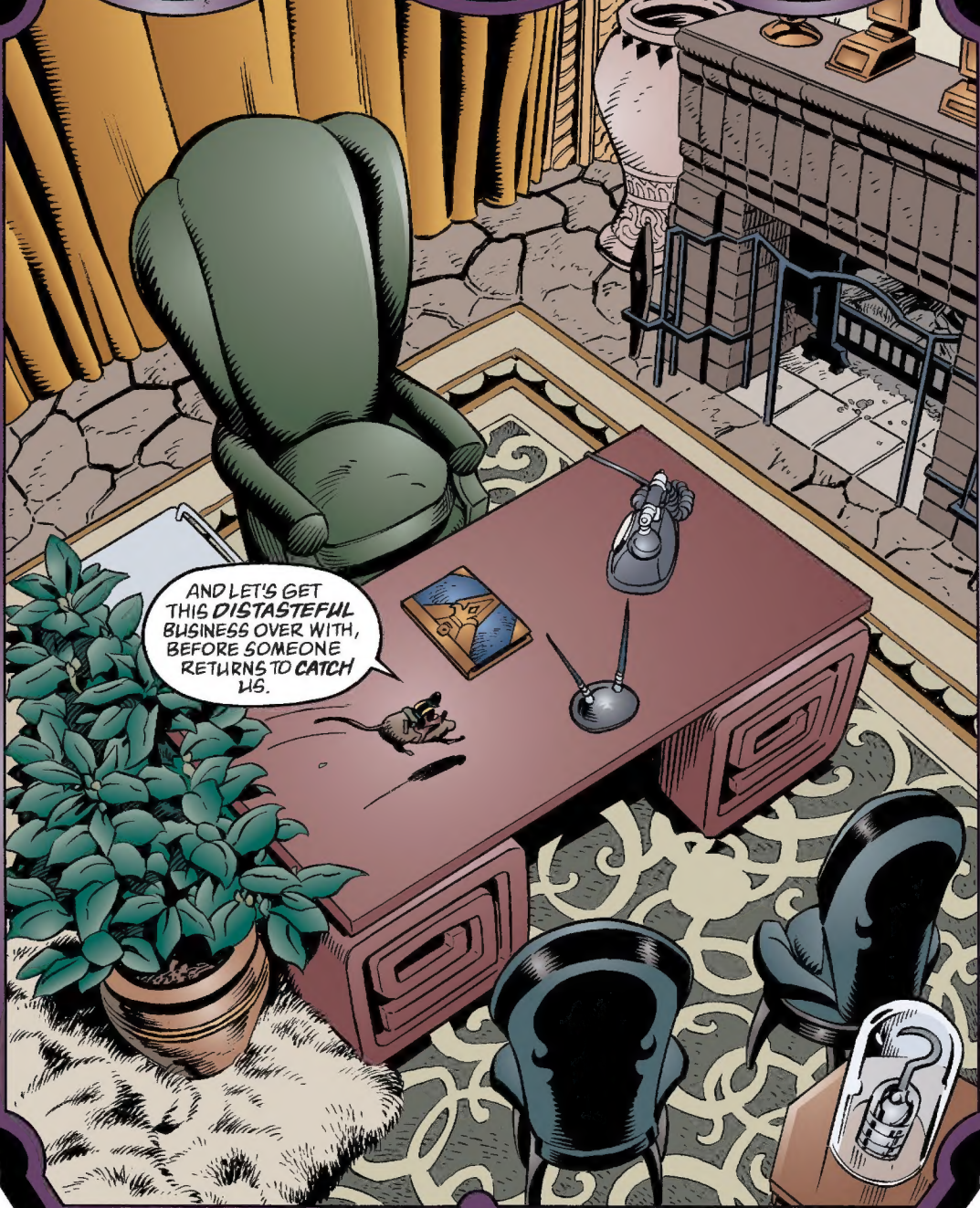




IT LOOKS
LIKE THE COAST IS
CLEAR, SARGE.



THEN
MOVE OUT,
CORPORAL.



AND LET'S GET
THIS **DISTASTEFUL**
BUSINESS OVER WITH,
BEFORE SOMEONE
RETURNS TO CATCH
US.

The Mouse Police Never Sleep



Storybook Love



Part One

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SPRINGTIME IN FABLETOWN, AND ALL IS RIGHT WITH THE WORLD.

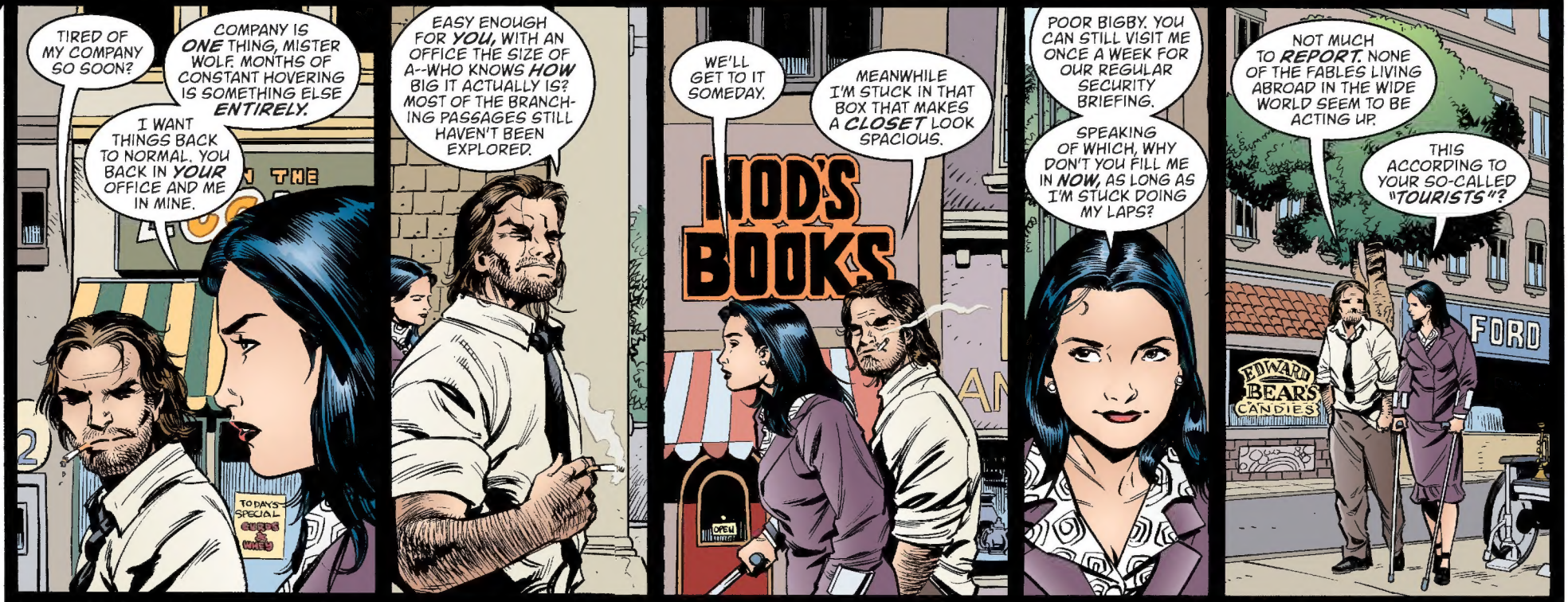
NOD'S BOOKS

GOOD AFTERNOON, SHERIFF. GOOD AFTERNOON, MISS WHITE. IT'S GREAT TO SEE YOU OUT AND ABOUT AGAIN.

ARE YOU SURE YOU'RE READY TO DO THIS, SNOW?

YOU SAID YOU'D STOP **BABYING** ME THE DAY I COULD WALK THREE TIMES UP AND DOWN BULLFINCH STREET, UNDER MY OWN POWER, **WITHOUT** NEEDING THE WHEEL-CHAIR.

WELL, COME HELL OR HIGH WATER, **THIS** IS THAT DAY, AFTER WHICH I'M DAMN WELL GOING TO HOLD YOU TO YOUR **PROMISE**.



TIRED OF MY COMPANY SO SOON?

COMPANY IS **ONE** THING, MISTER WOLF. MONTHS OF CONSTANT HOVERING IS SOMETHING ELSE **ENTIRELY**.

I WANT THINGS BACK TO NORMAL. YOU BACK IN **YOUR** OFFICE AND ME IN MINE.

EASY ENOUGH FOR **YOU**, WITH AN OFFICE THE SIZE OF A--WHO KNOWS **HOW** BIG IT ACTUALLY IS? MOST OF THE BRANCHING PASSAGES STILL HAVEN'T BEEN EXPLORED.

WE'LL GET TO IT SOMEDAY.

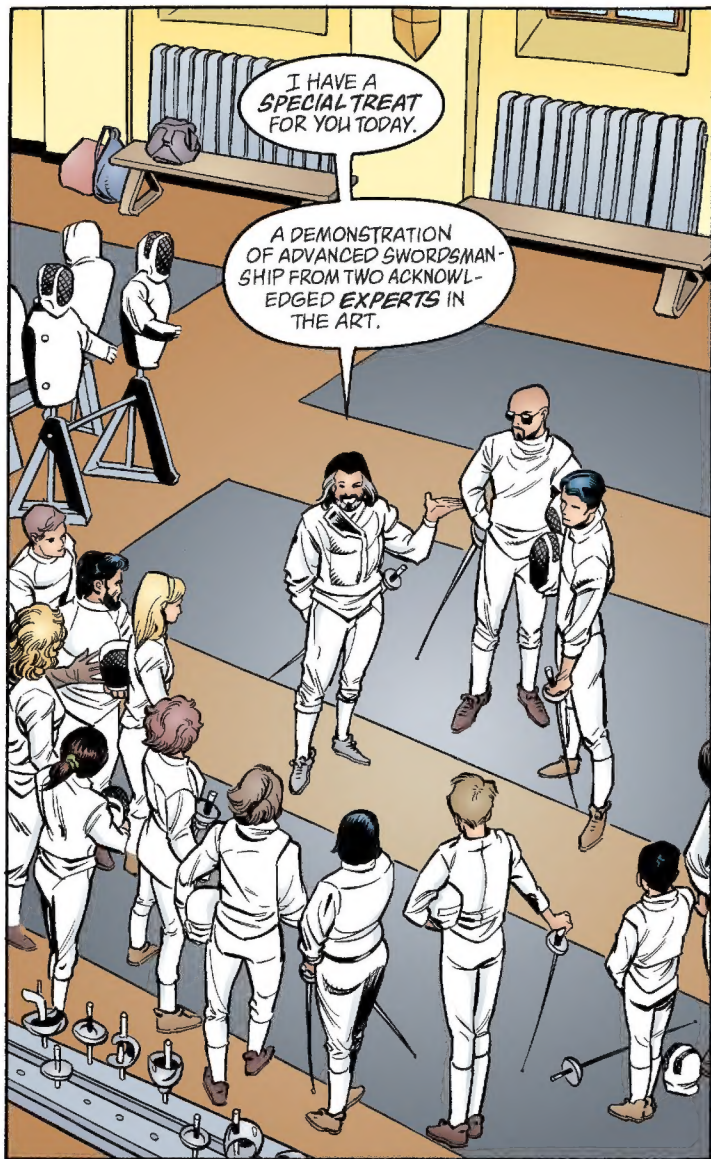
MEANWHILE I'M STUCK IN THAT BOX THAT MAKES A **CLOSET** LOOK SPACIOUS.

POOR BIGBY. YOU CAN STILL VISIT ME ONCE A WEEK FOR OUR REGULAR SECURITY BRIEFING.

SPEAKING OF WHICH, WHY DON'T YOU FILL ME IN **NOW**, AS LONG AS I'M STUCK DOING MY LAPS?

NOT MUCH TO **REPORT**. NONE OF THE FABLES LIVING ABROAD IN THE WIDE WORLD SEEM TO BE ACTING UP.

THIS ACCORDING TO YOUR SO-CALLED **"TOURISTS"**?



I HAVE A SPECIAL TREAT FOR YOU TODAY.

A DEMONSTRATION OF ADVANCED SWORDSMANSHIP FROM TWO ACKNOWLEDGED EXPERTS IN THE ART.



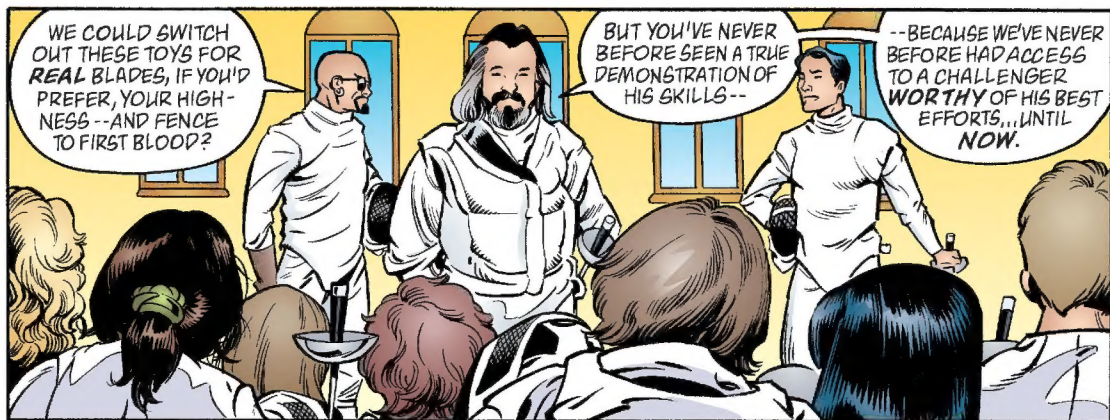
YES, MA'AM, BUT I REMIND YOU THAT WITH ONLY THREE FIELD AGENTS TO COVER THE ENTIRE MUNDY WORLD, I CAN HARDLY GUARANTEE--

FORGET IT, BIGBY. WE ARE **NOT** TURNING THIS INTO ANOTHER GRIPE SESSION ABOUT YOUR OPERATING BHDGET.



ONE OF THEM YOU ALREADY KNOW WELL. **LORD BLUEBEARD** HAS GENEROUSLY DONATED HIS TIME AS ONE OF OUR GUEST INSTRUCTORS, OVER THE MANY YEARS.

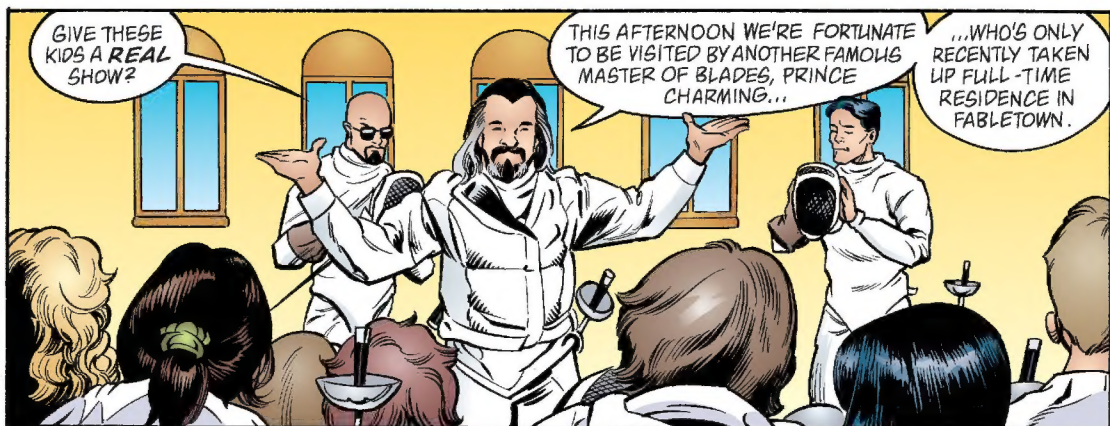




WE COULD SWITCH OUT THESE TOYS FOR REAL BLADES, IF YOU'D PREFER, YOUR HIGHNESS -- AND FENCE TO FIRST BLOOD?

BUT YOU'VE NEVER BEFORE SEEN A TRUE DEMONSTRATION OF HIS SKILLS --

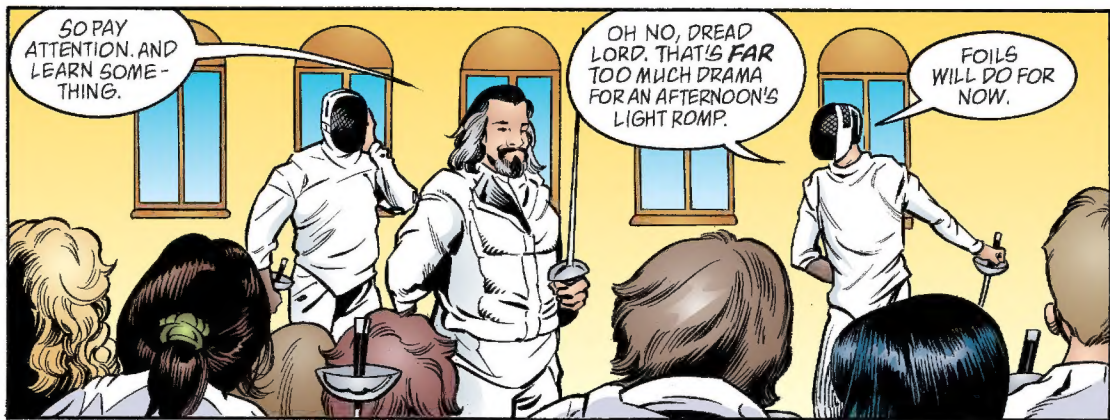
-- BECAUSE WE'VE NEVER BEFORE HAD ACCESS TO A CHALLENGER WORTHY OF HIS BEST EFFORTS... UNTIL NOW.



GIVE THESE KIDS A REAL SHOW?

THIS AFTERNOON WE'RE FORTUNATE TO BE VISITED BY ANOTHER FAMOUS MASTER OF BLADES, PRINCE CHARMING...

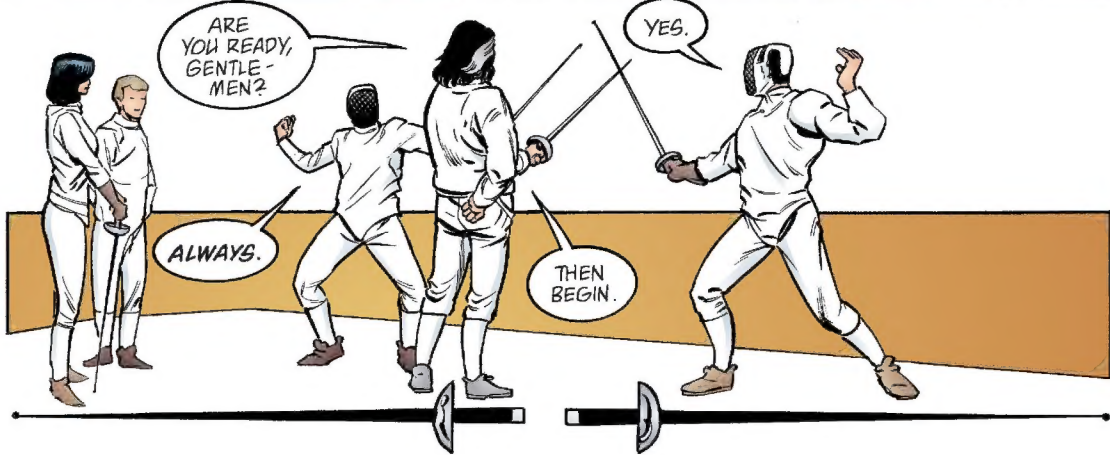
...WHO'S ONLY RECENTLY TAKEN UP FULL-TIME RESIDENCE IN FABLETOWN.



SO PAY ATTENTION AND LEARN SOMETHING.

OH NO, DREAD LORD. THAT'S FAR TOO MUCH DRAMA FOR AN AFTERNOON'S LIGHT ROMP.

FOILS WILL DO FOR NOW.



ARE YOU READY, GENTLEMEN?

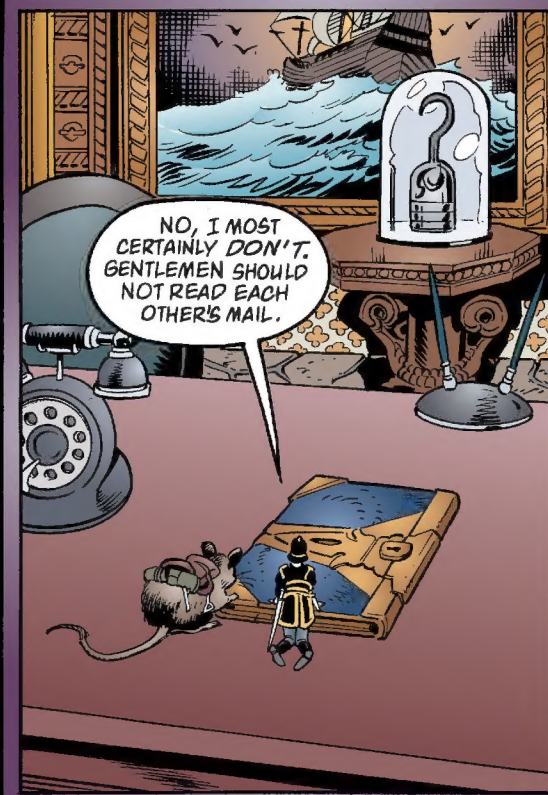
YES.

ALWAYS.

THEN BEGIN.



I TAKE IT YOU DON'T LIKE ESPIONAGE MISSIONS, SERGEANT WILFRED?



NO, I MOST CERTAINLY DON'T. GENTLEMEN SHOULD NOT READ EACH OTHER'S MAIL.

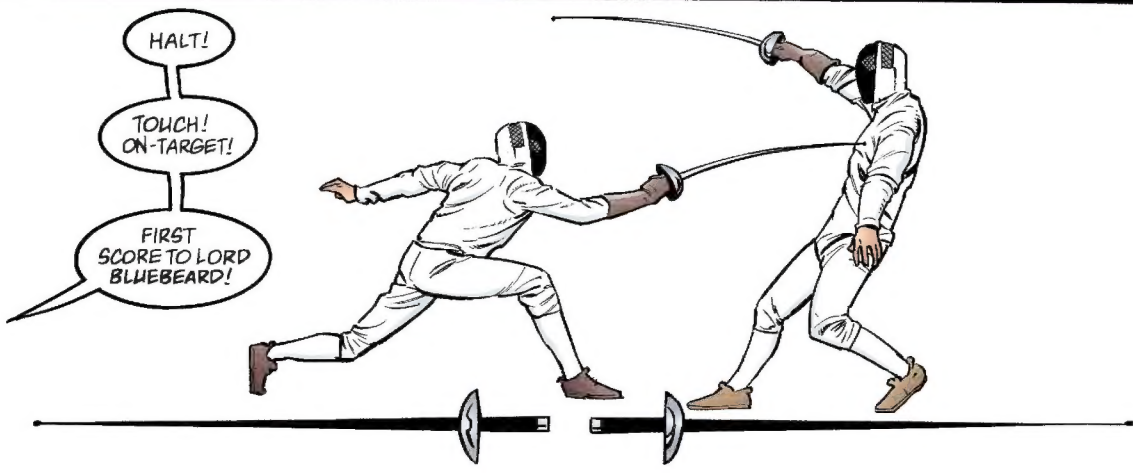


BUT SINCE WE CAN'T PICK AND CHOOSE WHICH DUTIES WE'RE CALLED TO PERFORM...

IT GETS US AWAY FROM THE FARM AT LEAST.



I'D MUCH RATHER STAY UP ON THE FARM, PATROLLING SMALLTOWN'S BORDERS. EVERY TIME WE'RE SENT DOWN TO THE CITY, WE END UP WORKING FOR ONE GULLIVER SPYING ON ANOTHER.



HALT!
TOUCH!
ON-TARGET!
FIRST SCORE TO LORD BLUEBEARD!

BUT IT'S ALL FOR THE GREATER GOOD, RIGHT, SARGE? THEY'RE FABLES TOO, SAME AS US. ONE BIG HAPPY FAMILY?

HARDLY.



FABLE OR MUNDY, THEY'RE STILL GULLIVERS DOWN HERE, AND WE'D BE BETTER OFF NOT GETTING DRAGGED INTO THEIR INTRIGUES.

WHO'S "WE," LILLIPUTIAN? I'M JUST A HUMBLE FIELD MOUSE WHO GOT DRAFTED INTO YOUR MOUSE POLICE.

MOUNTED POLICE, CORPORAL REX.



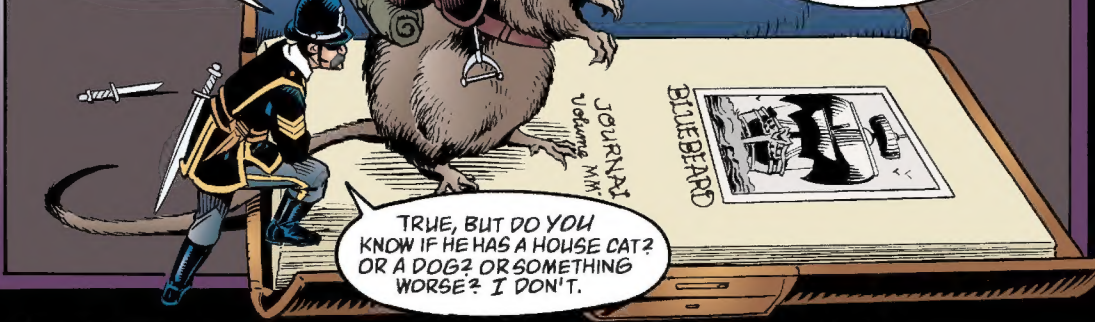
SNAP!

FINE, BUT IT WAS YOUR PEOPLE WHO COINED THE NICKNAME, NOT MINE. WEREN'T YOU JUST TELLING ME THAT THERE'S NO "YOUR PEOPLE" AND "MY PEOPLE"? AND "MY PEOPLE"? WHAT HAPPENED TO "WE'RE ALL FABLES TOGETHER"?



THE INTEL WAS ACCURATE AT LEAST. THIS IS HIS JOURNAL. YOU KEEP A LOOKOUT WHILE I READ.

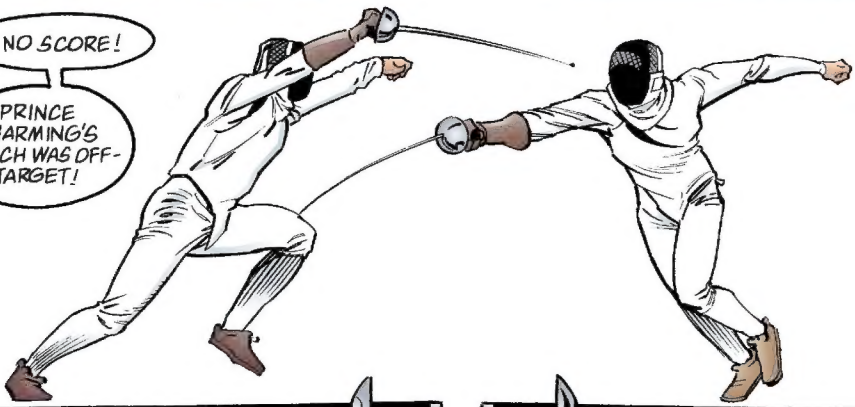
BLUEBEARD AND HIS BUTLER SHOULD BE SAFELY BUSY AT THE FENCING STUDIO FOR QUITE A WHILE YET.



TRUE, BUT DO YOU KNOW IF HE HAS A HOUSE CAT? OR A DOG? OR SOMETHING WORSE? I DON'T.

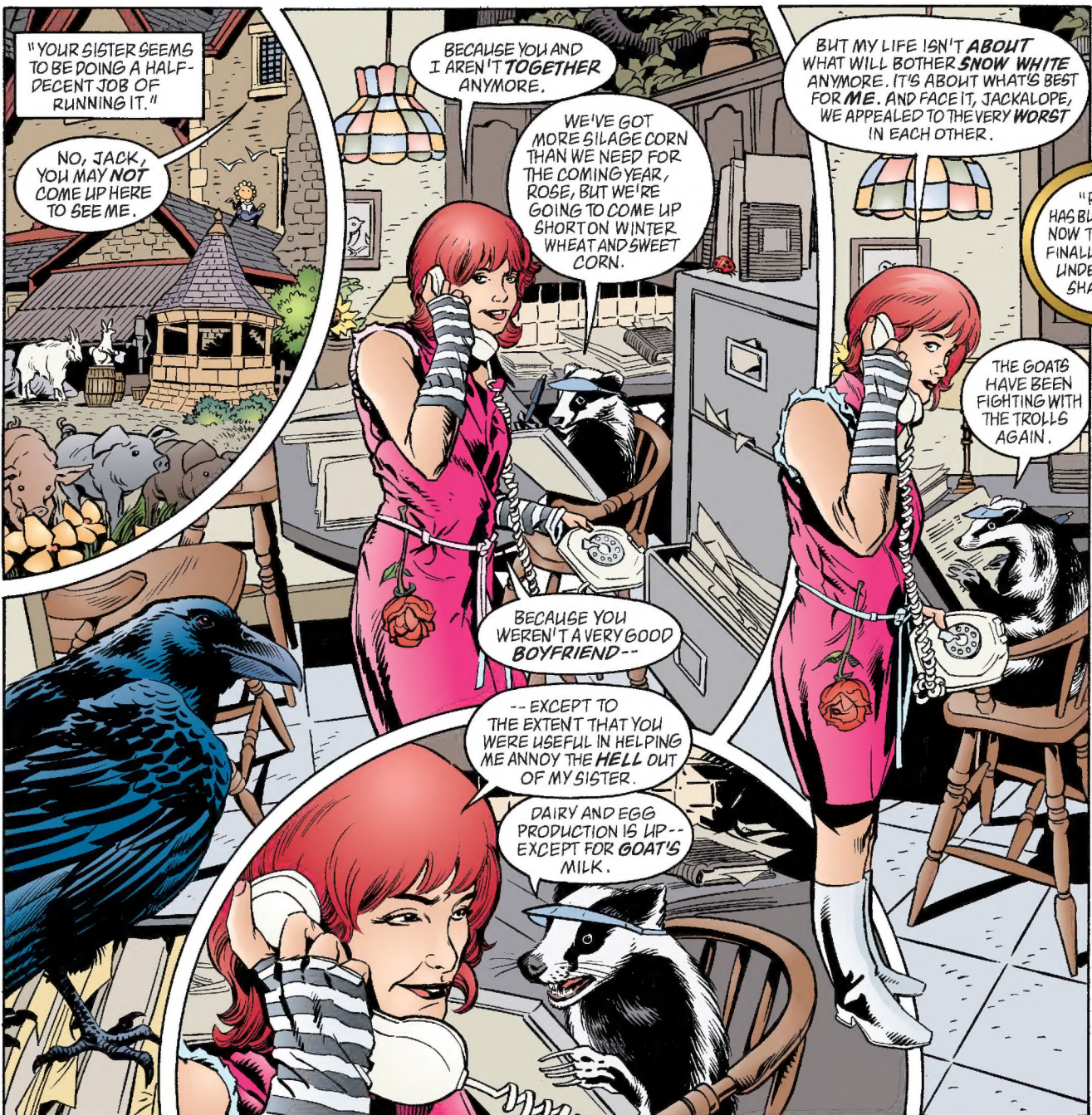
NO SCORE!

PRINCE CHARMING'S TOUCH WAS OFF-TARGET!





THINGS ARE MORE OR LESS BACK TO NORMAL AT THE FARM.



"YOUR SISTER SEEMS TO BE DOING A HALF-DECENT JOB OF RUNNING IT."

NO, JACK, YOU MAY NOT COME UP HERE TO SEE ME.

BECAUSE YOU AND I AREN'T TOGETHER ANYMORE.

WE'VE GOT MORE SILAGE CORN THAN WE NEED FOR THE COMING YEAR, ROSE, BUT WE'RE GOING TO COME UP SHORT ON WINTER WHEAT AND SWEET CORN.

BUT MY LIFE ISN'T ABOUT WHAT WILL BOTHER SNOW WHITE ANYMORE. IT'S ABOUT WHAT'S BEST FOR ME. AND FACE IT, JACKALOPE, WE APPEALED TO THE VERY WORST IN EACH OTHER.

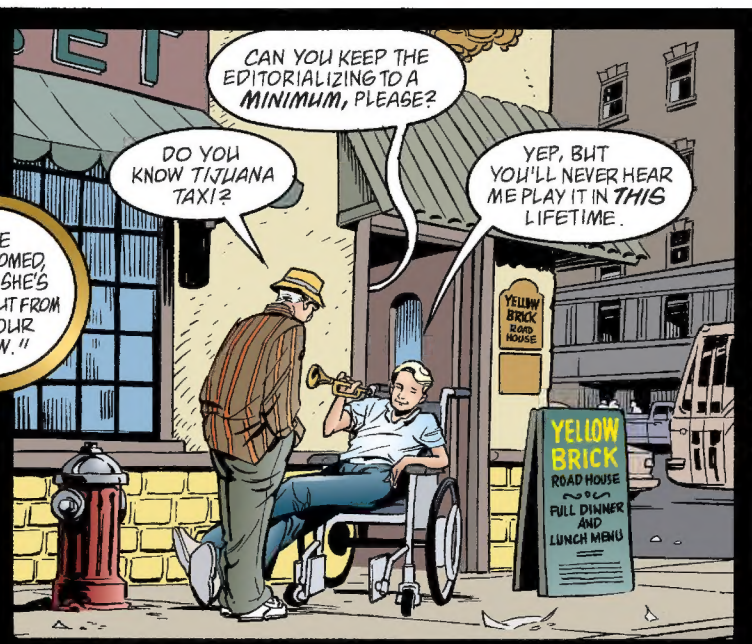
"ROSE HAS BLOSSOMED, NOW THAT SHE'S FINALLY OUT FROM UNDER YOUR SHADOW."

THE GOATS HAVE BEEN FIGHTING WITH THE TROLLS AGAIN.

BECAUSE YOU WEREN'T A VERY GOOD BOYFRIEND--

-- EXCEPT TO THE EXTENT THAT YOU WERE USEFUL IN HELPING ME ANNOY THE HELL OUT OF MY SISTER.

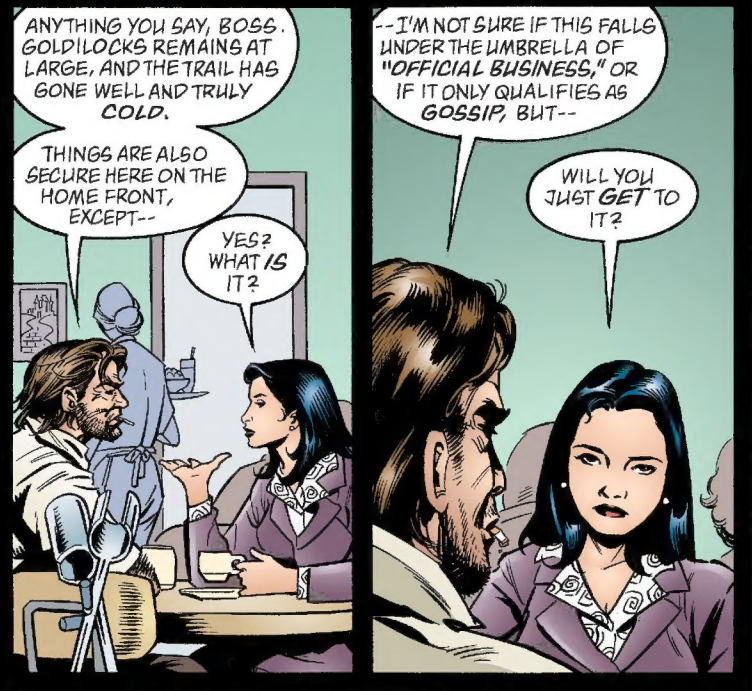
DAIRY AND EGG PRODUCTION IS UP-- EXCEPT FOR GOAT'S MILK.



CAN YOU KEEP THE EDITORIALIZING TO A MINIMUM, PLEASE?

DO YOU KNOW TIJUANA TAXI?

YEP, BUT YOU'LL NEVER HEAR ME PLAY IT IN THIS LIFETIME.



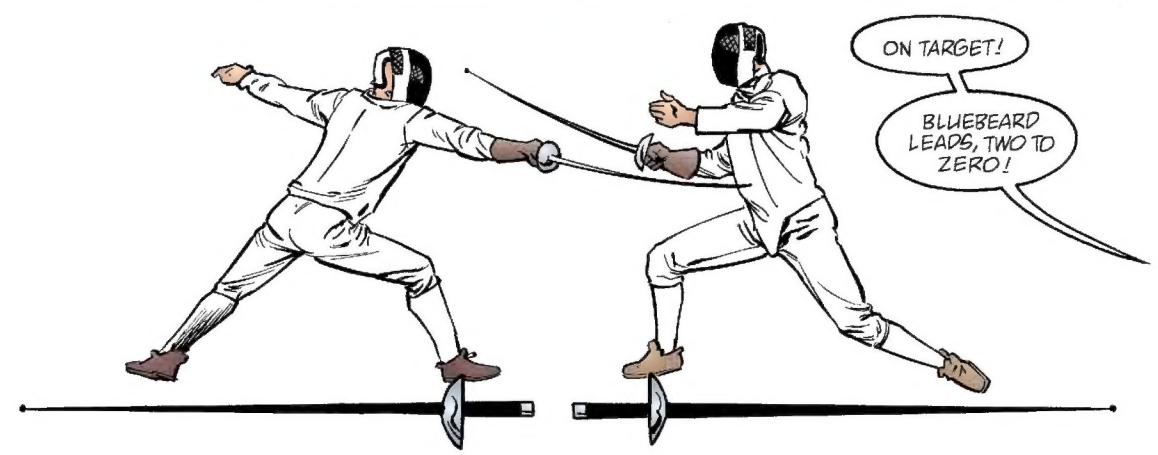
ANYTHING YOU SAY, BOSS. GOLDILOCKS REMAINS AT LARGE, AND THE TRAIL HAS GONE WELL AND TRULY COLD.

-- I'M NOT SURE IF THIS FALLS UNDER THE UMBRELLA OF "OFFICIAL BUSINESS," OR IF IT ONLY QUALIFIES AS GOSSIP, BUT--

THINGS ARE ALSO SECURE HERE ON THE HOME FRONT, EXCEPT--

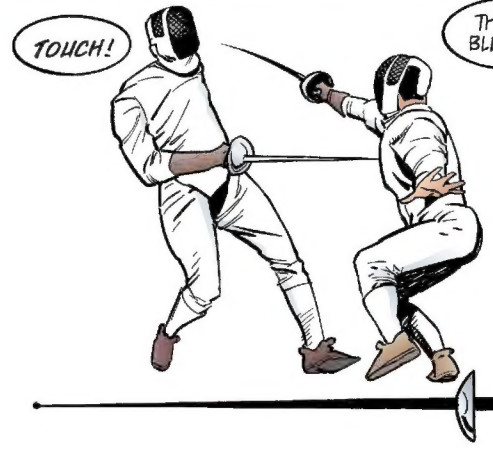
YES? WHAT IS IT?

WILL YOU JUST GET TO IT?



ON TARGET!

BLUEBEARD LEADS, TWO TO ZERO!

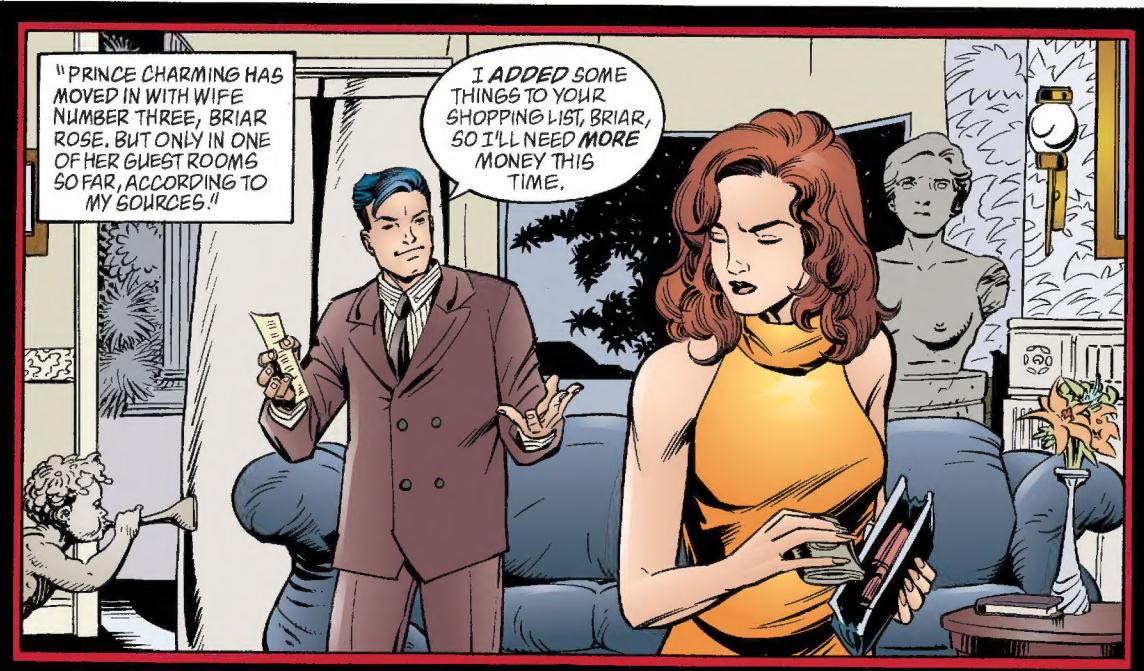


TOUCH!

THREE TO NOTHING, BLUEBEARD'S FAVOR.

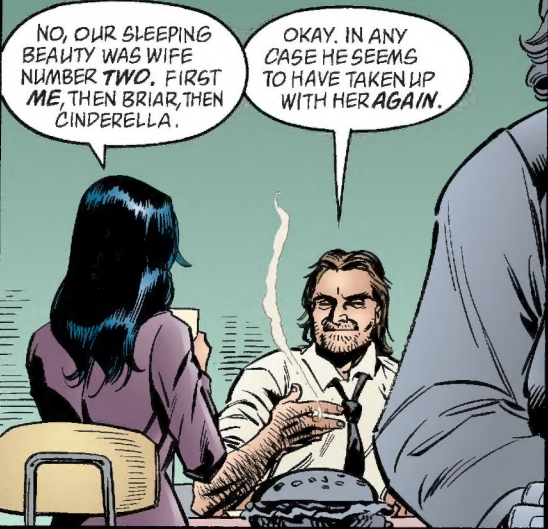


FOUR TO ZERO!



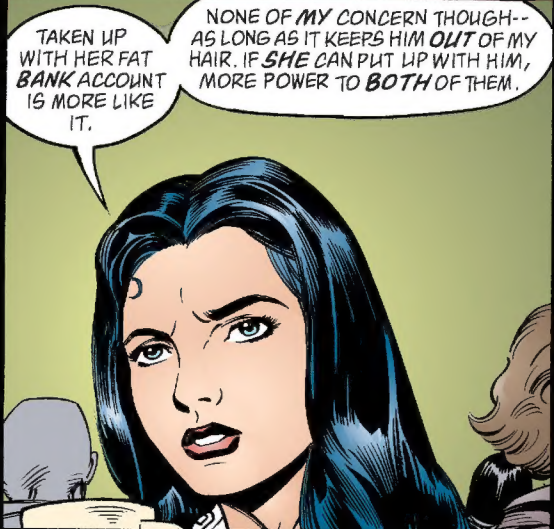
"PRINCE CHARMING HAS MOVED IN WITH WIFE NUMBER THREE, BRIAR ROSE. BUT ONLY IN ONE OF HER GUEST ROOMS SO FAR, ACCORDING TO MY SOURCES!"

I ADDED SOME THINGS TO YOUR SHOPPING LIST, BRIAR, SO I'LL NEED MORE MONEY THIS TIME.



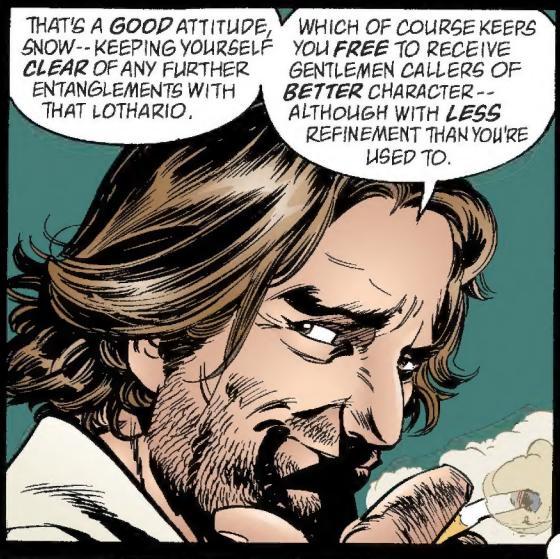
NO, OUR SLEEPING BEAUTY WAS WIFE NUMBER TWO. FIRST ME, THEN BRIAR, THEN CINDERELLA.

OKAY. IN ANY CASE HE SEEMS TO HAVE TAKEN UP WITH HER AGAIN.



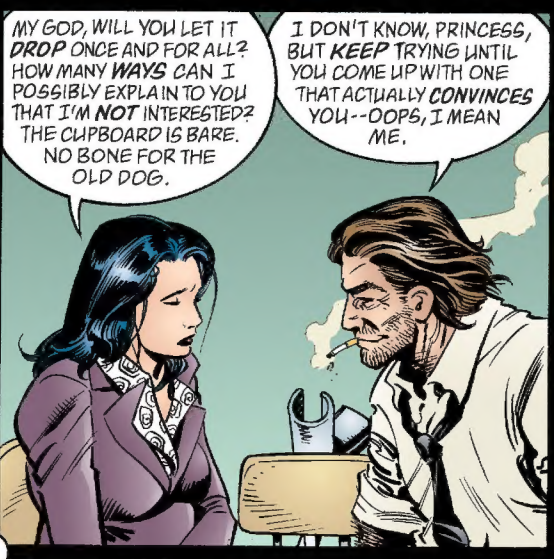
TAKEN UP WITH HER FAT BANK ACCOUNT IS MORE LIKE IT.

NONE OF MY CONCERN THOUGH-- AS LONG AS IT KEEPS HIM OUT OF MY HAIR. IF SHE CAN PUT UP WITH HIM, MORE POWER TO BOTH OF THEM.



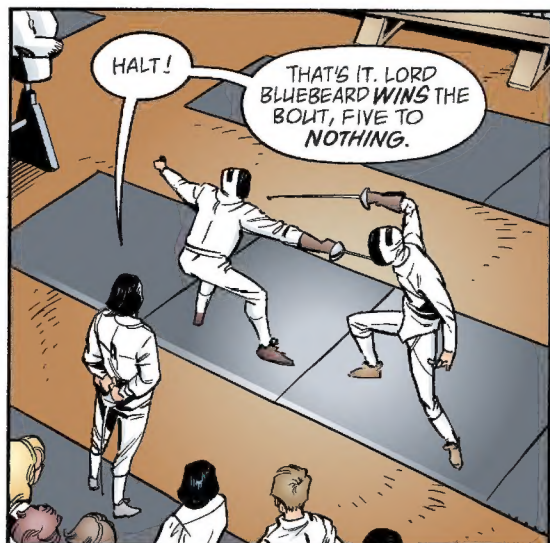
THAT'S A GOOD ATTITUDE, SNOW-- KEEPING YOURSELF CLEAR OF ANY FURTHER ENTANGLEMENTS WITH THAT LOTHARIO.

WHICH OF COURSE KEEPS YOU FREE TO RECEIVE GENTLEMEN CALLERS OF BETTER CHARACTER-- ALTHOUGH WITH LESS REFINEMENT THAN YOU'RE USED TO.



MY GOD, WILL YOU LET IT DROP ONCE AND FOR ALL? HOW MANY WAYS CAN I POSSIBLY EXPLAIN TO YOU THAT I'M NOT INTERESTED? THE CHIPBOARD IS BARE. NO BONE FOR THE OLD DOG.

I DON'T KNOW, PRINCESS, BUT KEEP TRYING UNTIL YOU COME UP WITH ONE THAT ACTUALLY CONVINCES YOU-- OOPS, I MEAN ME.



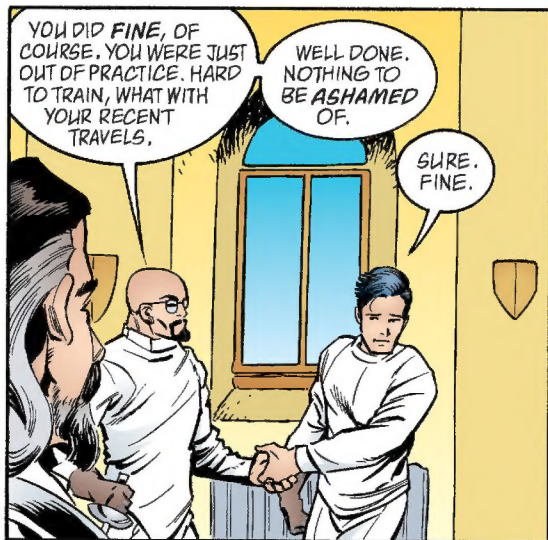
HALT!

THAT'S IT. LORD BLUEBEARD WINS THE BOLT, FIVE TO NOTHING.



HA! A CLEAN SWEEP!

CONGRATULATIONS, BLUEBEARD.



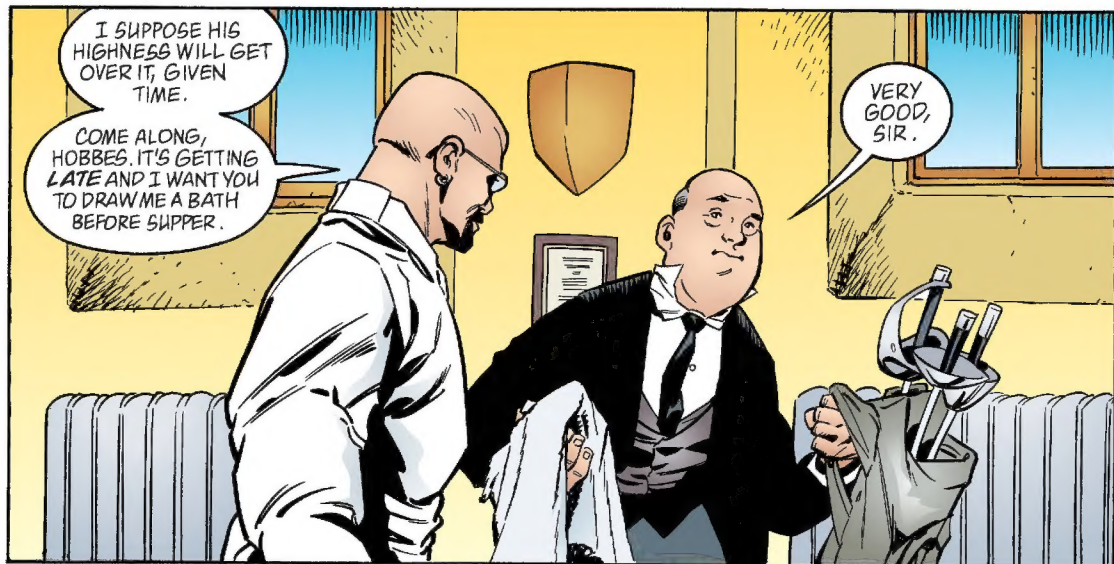
YOU DID FINE, OF COURSE. YOU WERE JUST OUT OF PRACTICE. HARD TO TRAIN, WHAT WITH YOUR RECENT TRAVELS.

WELL DONE. NOTHING TO BE ASHAMED OF.

SURE. FINE.



NOW, IF YOU'LL EXCUSE ME--




I SUPPOSE HIS HIGHNESS WILL GET OVER IT, GIVEN TIME.

COME ALONG, HOBBS. IT'S GETTING LATE AND I WANT YOU TO DRAW ME A BATH BEFORE SUPPER.

VERY GOOD, SIR.







YOU SHOULD TELL YOUR MANSERVANT HOBBS THAT HE DOESN'T NEED TO PUT HIS GLAMOUR UP EVERY TIME I SEE HIM.



I'M NO HOMOCENTRIC SPECIES BIGOT.




AND I'M HARDLY A SHRINKING VIOLET, TO WILT AT THE SIGHT OF A GOBLIN MALE IN HIS NATURAL STATE.



HOBBS' NATURAL STATE WAS *SACKED* BY THE ADVERSARY, JUST AS YOURS AND MINE WERE, GOLDI-LOCKS.

YOU KNOW WHAT I MEANT.



YES, AND I KNOW THE *INCREASINGLY* OVERT SUGGESTIONS YOU'VE BEEN MAKING TO HOBBS EVERY TIME HE'S HAD TO VISIT YOUR ROOMS.

HE TOLD YOU?

HE TELLS ME *EVERYTHING*, AND HE'S NOT COMFORTABLE WITH YOUR BEHAVIOR OF LATE.

NOT INTERESTED IN *WOMEN*, HUH?



AT LEAST NOT HUMAN WOMEN, SO PLEASE LEAVE HIM ALONE. HE HAS HIS *DUTIES* TO ATTEND TO.



BUT I'M *BORED*, LOCKED AWAY HERE IN THIS DREARY PLACE. YOU TWO ARE THE ONLY OTHER PEOPLE I'VE SEEN IN *MONTHS*.

I NEED MY *DISTRACTIONS*. AND I'M USED TO MORE *VARIETY* IN MY-- I MEAN YOU'RE FINE AND ALL, BUT--



IT CAN'T BE HELPED. YOU'RE NOT SAFE ANYWHERE ELSE. BY NOW EVERY *FABLE* IN THIS *STATE* IS ON THE LOOKOUT FOR YOU.

OH MY.

GOLDILOCKS! HERE?!



SO, WHEN ARE YOU GOING TO LET ME IN ON YOUR PLAN TO GET ME TO SAFETY--AND MORE IMPORTANT--WHAT'S IT GOING TO COST ME? MORE THAN THE OCCASIONAL BLOW JOB, I SUSPECT.



LET'S MOVE OUT, CORPORAL REX. THIS NEEDS REPORTING IMMEDIATELY.



ENOUGH TO OFFSET THE TERRIBLE RISK I'M TAKING BY HIDING YOU.



HUH?!



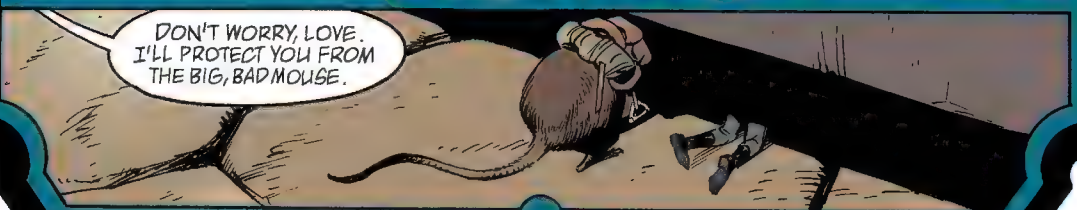
I SAID, IT WOULD COST YOU ENOUGH TO OFFSET--



NOT YOU! I SAW SOMETHING! A MOUSE!



DON'T WORRY, LOVE. I'LL PROTECT YOU FROM THE BIG, BAD MOUSE.





IT WASN'T JUST A
MOUSE, YOU FOOL! I
THINK IT HAD A RIDER! IT'S
THE GODDAMN MOUNTED
POLICE!

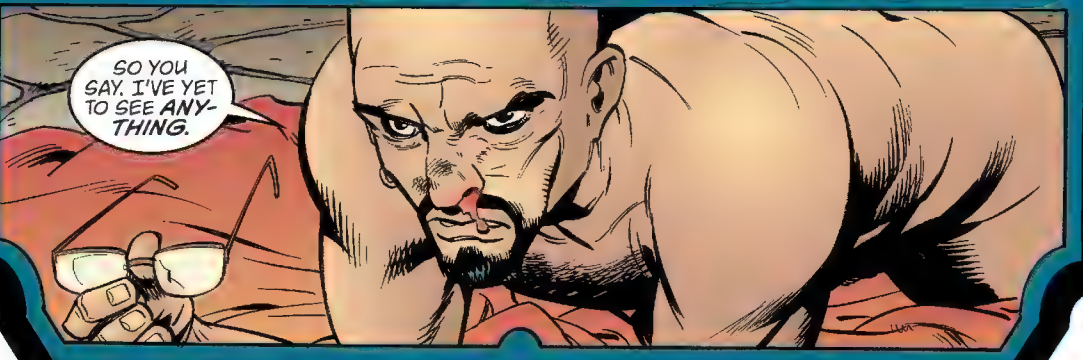
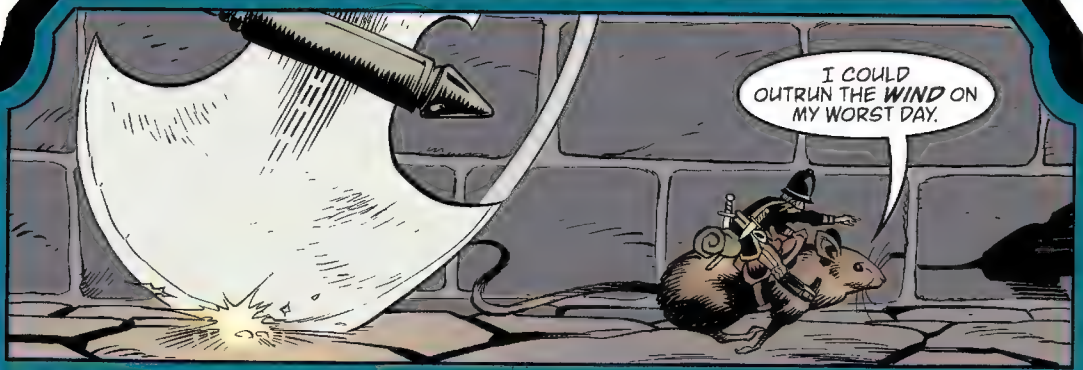
HELP ME CATCH IT,
OR KILL IT, OR WE'LL
BOTH HANG!

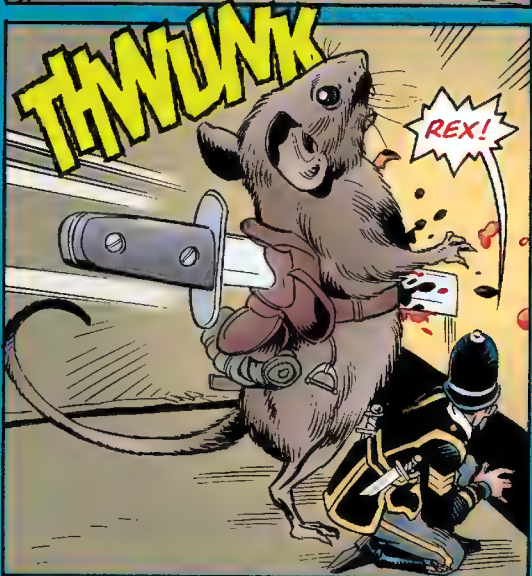
BUT--!

THERE
THEY GO!

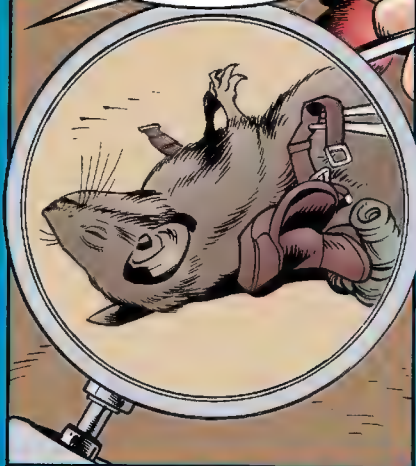
RUN
LIKE THE WIND,
REX!

SCREW
THE
WIND!





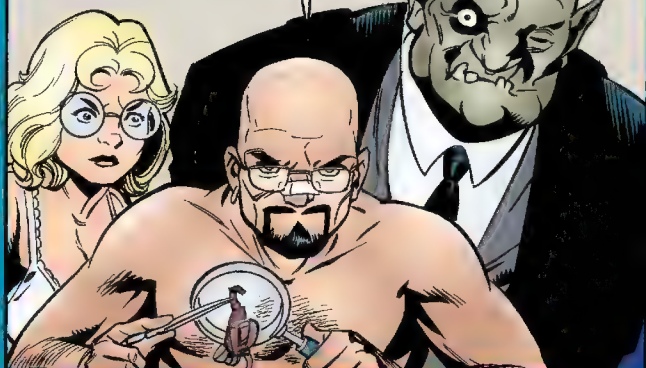
SEE THE **SADDLE?** THEY WERE MOUNTED POLICE SPIES, ALL RIGHT.



BUT WHO WOULD THEY HAVE BEEN **SPYING** FOR?

SNOW WHITE OR BIGBY. EITHER WAY, WE'RE **DEAD** AS SOON AS THIS THING'S PARTNER REACHES ONE OF THEM TO REPORT WHAT HE SAW.

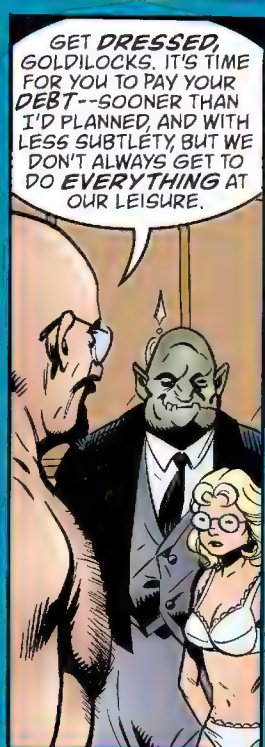
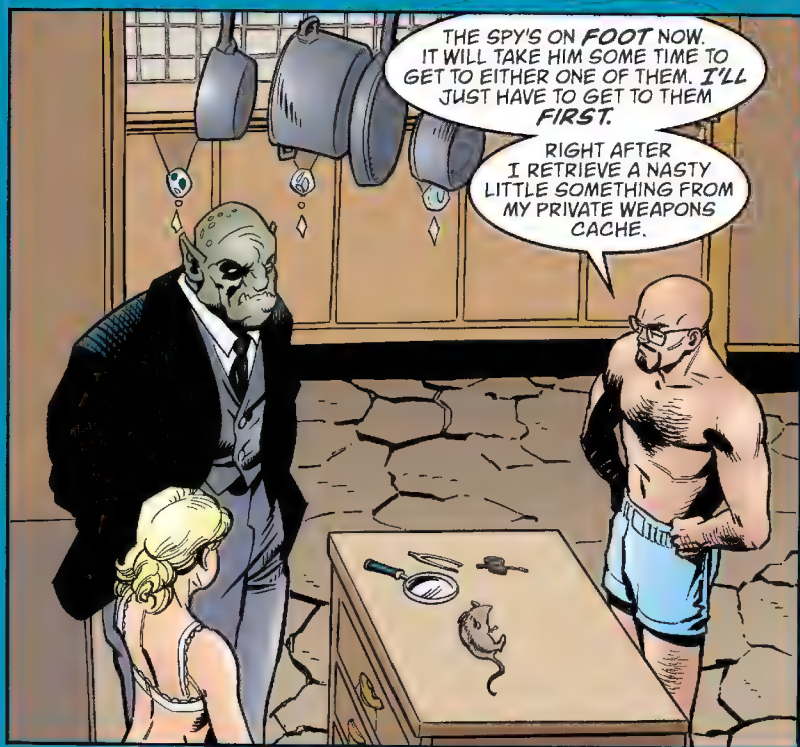
SO WHAT WILL YOU DO, SIR?



THE SPY'S ON **FOOT** NOW IT WILL TAKE HIM SOME TIME TO GET TO EITHER ONE OF THEM. I'LL JUST HAVE TO GET TO THEM **FIRST**.

RIGHT AFTER I RETRIEVE A NASTY LITTLE SOMETHING FROM MY PRIVATE WEAPONS **CACHE**.

GET DRESSED, GOLDILOCKS. IT'S TIME FOR YOU TO PAY YOUR **DEBT**--SOONER THAN I'D PLANNED, AND WITH LESS **SUBTLETY**, BUT WE DON'T ALWAYS GET TO DO **EVERYTHING** AT OUR LEISURE.





OKAY, WE'RE HERE.



NOW WILL YOU TELL US WHAT'S SO IMPORTANT YOU HAD TO DRAG US BOTH OUT OF BED LONG BEFORE NORMAL BUSINESS HOURS?



YOU'LL BE GLAD I DID, MISS WHITE. LOOK AT THIS.

OKAY, I'LL BITE. WHAT IS IT?



SOMETHING JACK TRIED TO SELL ME LAST NIGHT AT THE BRANSTOCK.

HE CLAIMS IT'S HIGHLY MAGICAL AND HE CAN SUPPLY A CASE OF THEM.



IN CLEAR VIOLATION OF THE REQUIREMENT TO TURN IN ALL SIGNIFICANT MAGIC ARTIFACTS FOR COMMUNAL OWNERSHIP AND SAFE STORAGE IN THE BUSINESS OFFICE.

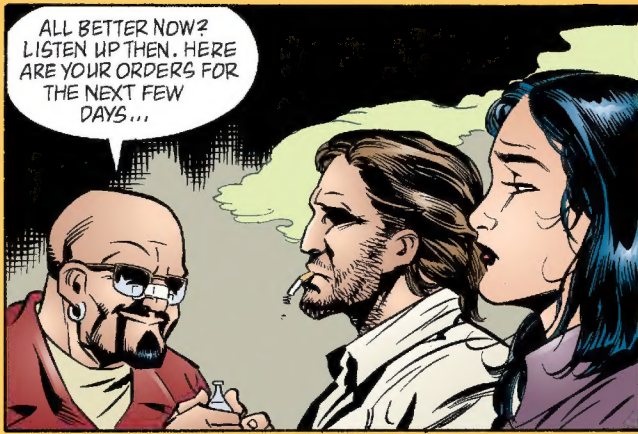
AND WAIT UNTIL YOU SEE WHAT IT DOES.

HEY, MAYBE YOU SHOULDN'T--



--DO THAT.

SON OF A--

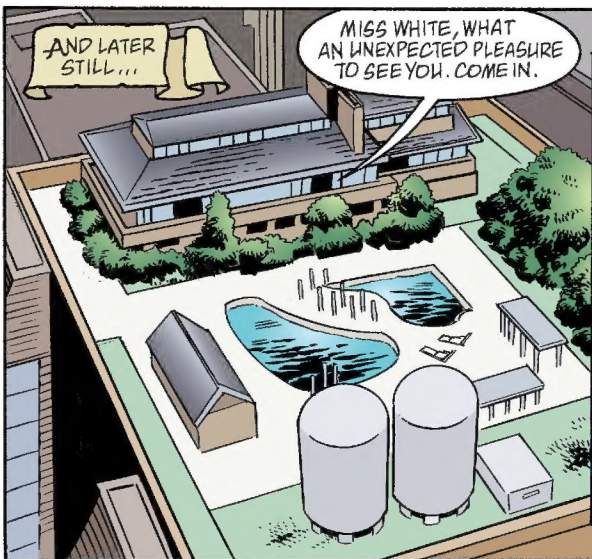


ALL BETTER NOW? LISTEN UP THEN. HERE ARE YOUR ORDERS FOR THE NEXT FEW DAYS...



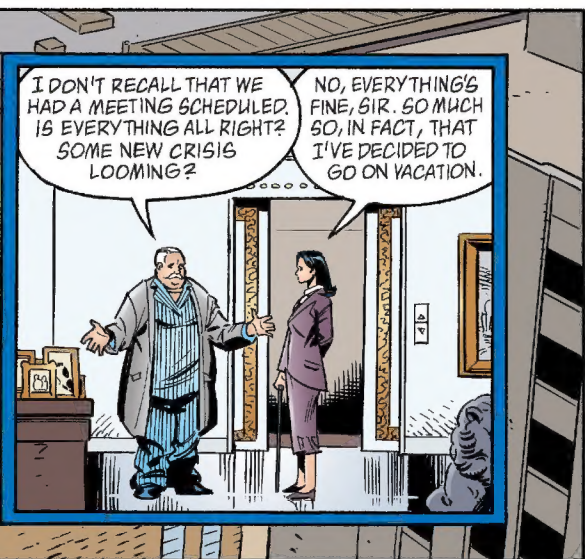
A BIT LATER...

AND REMEMBER, IF BY CHANCE YOU MANAGE TO SURVIVE, EVERYTHING WAS JACK'S FAULT.



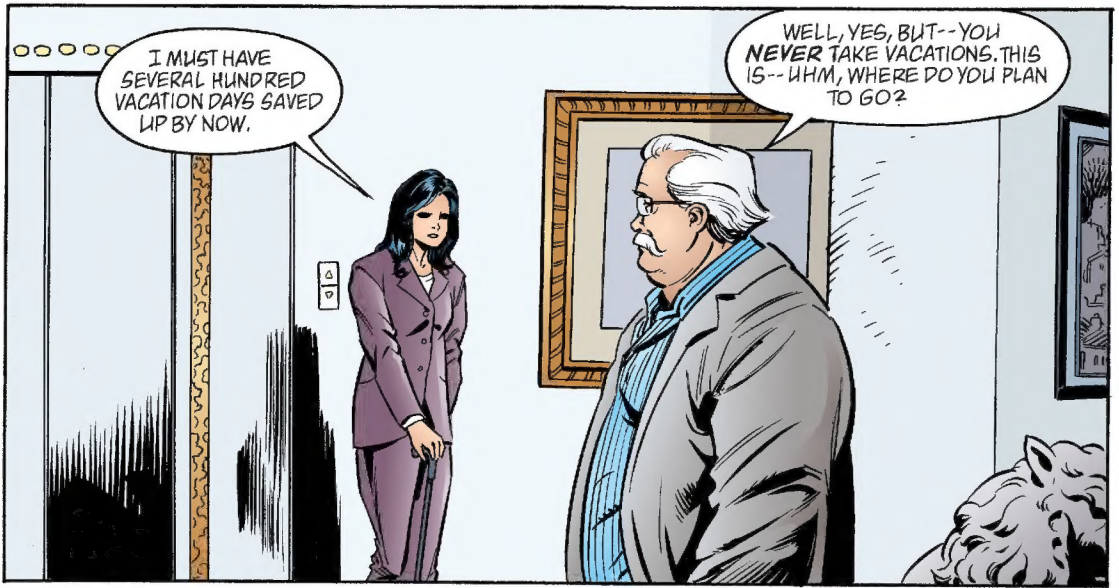
AND LATER STILL...

MISS WHITE, WHAT AN UNEXPECTED PLEASURE TO SEE YOU. COME IN.



I DON'T RECALL THAT WE HAD A MEETING SCHEDULED. IS EVERYTHING ALL RIGHT? SOME NEW CRISIS LOOMING?

NO, EVERYTHING'S FINE, SIR. SO MUCH SO, IN FACT, THAT I'VE DECIDED TO GO ON VACATION.



I MUST HAVE SEVERAL HUNDRED VACATION DAYS SAVED UP BY NOW.

WELL, YES, BUT-- YOU NEVER TAKE VACATIONS. THIS IS-- UHM, WHERE DO YOU PLAN TO GO?



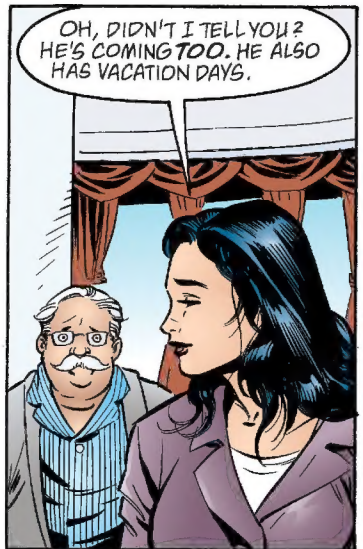
I'M NOT SURE. MAYBE I'LL TRY THE TABLES IN LAS VEGAS, OR LIE ON THE BEACH IN CANCUN.

NO-- BETTER YET, SOMEWHERE NO PHONES CAN REACH ME. MAYBE I'LL GO CAMPING SOMEWHERE FAR AND REMOTE.

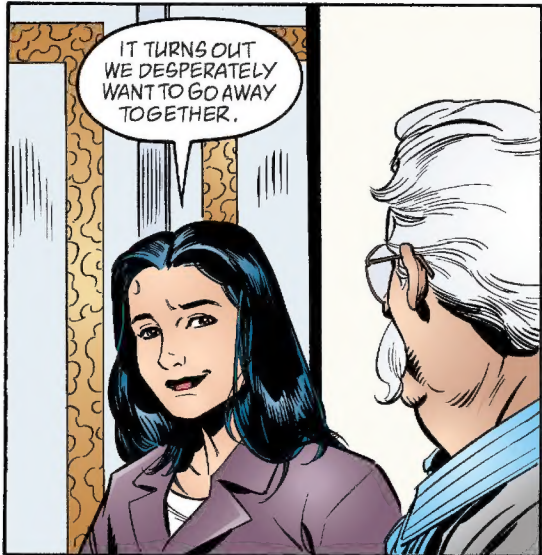


I TOLD BOY BLUE TO CONSULT YOU IF ANYTHING IMPORTANT COMES UP WHILE I'M GONE.

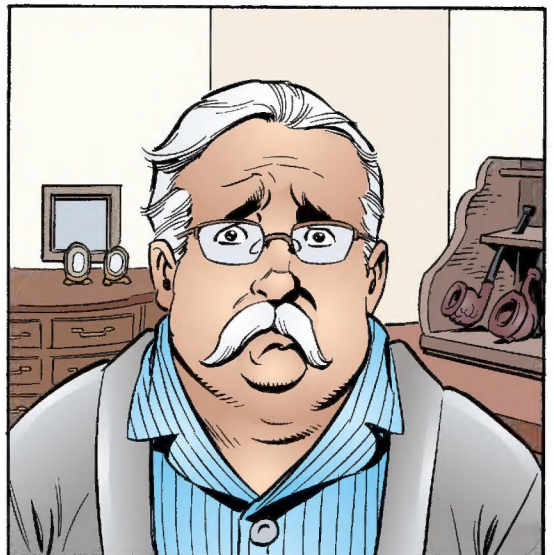
CONSULT ME? WHY ME? THAT'S NOT OUR SYSTEM. WHY NOT BIGBY WOLF?

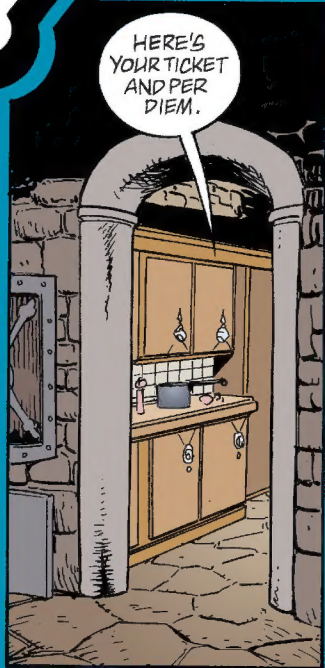


OH, DIDN'T I TELL YOU? HE'S COMING TOO. HE ALSO HAS VACATION DAYS.



IT TURNS OUT WE DESPERATELY WANT TO GO AWAY TOGETHER.





HERE'S YOUR TICKET AND PER DIEM.



YOU'LL BE ON THE SAME FLIGHT THEY'RE ON, BUT DON'T WORRY-- I'VE BOUGHT YOU A STRONG GLAMOUR. AND BESIDES, THEY'RE NOT ALLOWED TO NOTICE YOU FOR A FEW DAYS AT LEAST.



YOU CAN'T BRING A GUN ON THE FLIGHT-- EVEN IN CHECKED BAGGAGE-- SO YOU'LL HAVE TO BUY ONE AT YOUR FINAL DESTINATION.

AND WHEN DO I KILL THEM?



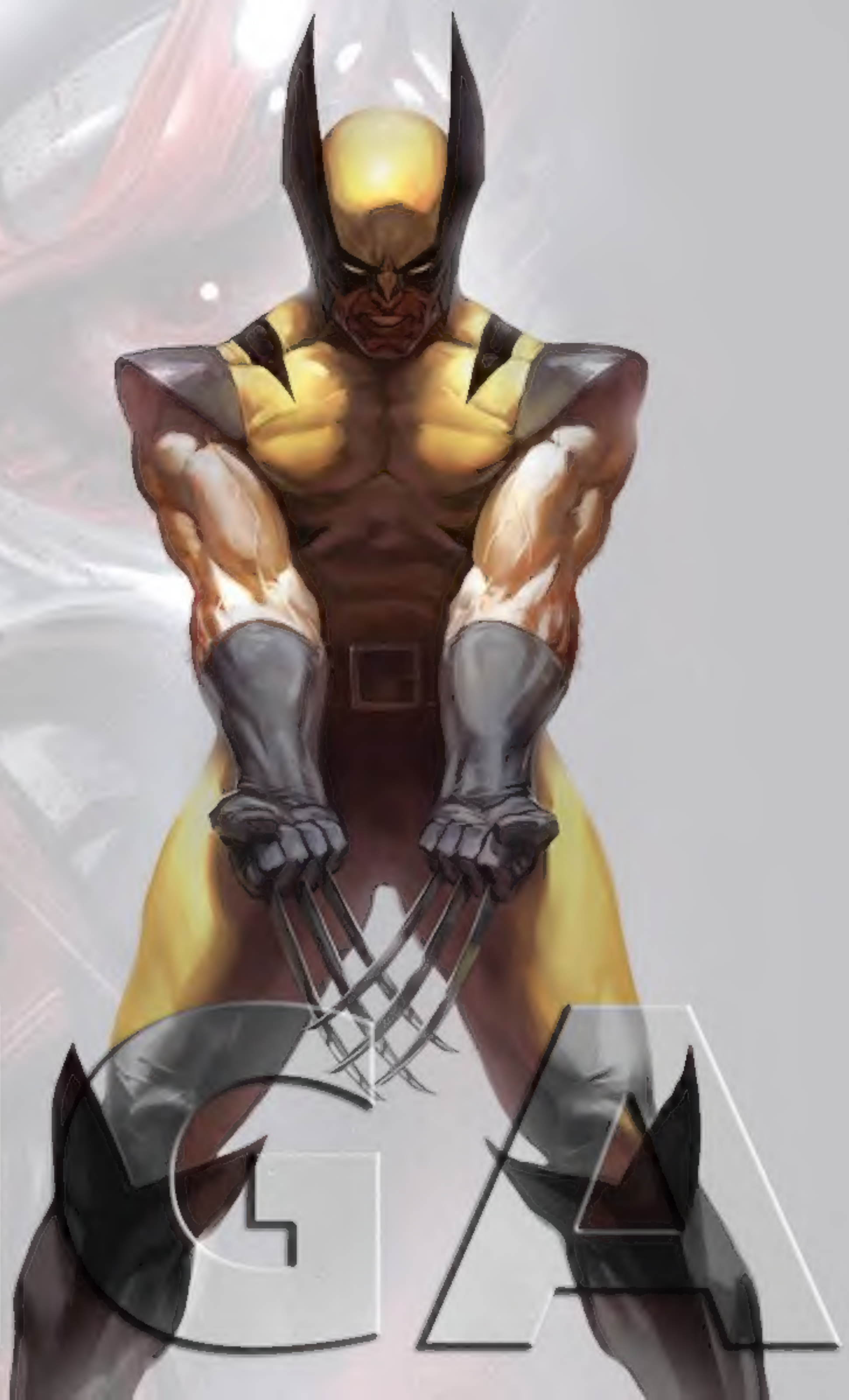
NOT UNTIL THEY'RE WELL AWAY FROM CIVILIZATION.

MAKE SURE THE BODIES WILL NEVER BE FOUND.



AND GOLDLOCKS-- THIS TIME DON'T BOTCH THE JOB.

NEXT:
FINAL
DESTINATION!



NATHAN